URBAN PLANNING AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE: London, Sydney and Singapore

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Abstract

This paper argues that urban plans in many major cities throughout the world have become increasingly oriented towards promoting the city's competitive advantage. Strategic land use plans during the 1990s have often been seen as tools to implement particular visions for the future of cities and linked to a particular rhetoric about economic change. A certain logic has been accepted in which economic globalisation is seen to lead to increased competition for investment between cities. The paper seeks to shows that this logic does not acknowledge the full complexity of the globalisation process and the debates it has generated. Through an examination of London, Sydney and Singapore the article shows how the strategies that have been prepared for these cities during the 1990s were geared towards enhancing their 'world city' status. It is argued that this approach produced particular institutional arrangements and strong private sector influence. As a result the plans emphasised a particular economic approach oriented to inward investment. Alternative reactions to globalisation are not explored and environmental and social concerns neglected.

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Recently there has been a renewed interest in urban planning throughout the cities of the developed world. Notwithstanding the influence of neo-liberal ideas, city politicians have been keen to formulate urban visions and strategies. This paper takes the view that this revival of strategic thinking is the result of particular reactions to changes in the global economy. It suggests that these economic changes infuse spatial decisions; they are interpreted in particular ways, influence the networks of power, affect institutional arrangements and become embedded in particular assumptions and priority-setting agendas. The paper focuses on a particular aspect of this process. It explores the way in which the strategic land use plans of three cities during the 1990s have been influenced by similar reactions to global economic change. It will argue that the political response has been to focus on the economic competition between cities and that this has created the parameters within which the plans have been produced. The policies adopted by the cities assume the need to prioritise inward investment. This has resulted in the production of 'visions' that are primarily documents to communicate with the international business community and strategic plans that show how their needs will be accommodated. It has resulted in a rather restricted treatment of environmental and social aspects. The paper therefore explores the way in which the renewed interest in strategic planning has been stimulated by this competitive attitude. Rhetoric has developed based on a particular conception of global economic change and this has led to the formulation of similar policy approaches in the three cities. The aim is to show the links between the chosen rhetoric, the representation of interests and the priorities embodied in the strategic plans.

Globalisation is often presented as the new dynamic influencing all dimensions of life. Different aspects can be highlighted (e.g. Sklair, 1995, focuses on the spread of the culture of consumerism). This paper will focus on the economic dimension, the increasingly global reach of economic processes, as this is the aspect that has had the greatest impact on planning. In the last decade globalisation 'has been at the centre of most political discussions and economic debates' (Giddens, 1998, p.28) and has become a 'buzz-word' of the 'nineties (Stilwell, 1997, p.1). However it is a contested concept, for example; does it match reality or is it an ideological construct; is it inevitable or can it be controlled; is there anything new about it? There is also a political aspect to the debate as it is often argued that nation states are losing some of their power to both supra- and sub- national levels and it is commonly observed that economic globalisation has enhanced the importance of cities. Thus the process of globalisation is complex and generates differing interpretations. The paper attempts to show that this was not adequately reflected in the strategic thinking of the three cities in the 1990s.

The first part of the paper briefly reviews the debates on globalisation and the resultant changes in major cities of the developed world. Policy makers in these cities are responding to these real or perceived pressures. It then turns to the way this has been interpreted in the strategic urban planning of three cities; London, Sydney and Singapore. London is universally identified at the top of the global city hierarchy as one of the 'World Cities', Sydney is a good example of a city playing a dominant

regional role while, in an era in which cities are said to be increasingly autonomous, Singapore - a city state - is an interesting example.

Globalisation and the 'World City' hypothesis

It is argued that a new form of economic globalisation is taking place that is leading to changes in the economic activity of cities. As a result a hierarchy of cities is evolving with 'World Cities' at the apex. The policy response to these developments is dominated by the notion of enhanced competitiveness. There are several links in this chain of reasoning: new economic forces are operating at a global level; these forces are inevitable; changes are taking place in the nature of cities; the cities are becoming more powerful *vis-a-vis* nation states; there is increasing competition between cities; planning must respond with a new approach that accommodates to globalisation and increased competition.

The general definition of economic globalisation is that economies are now networked across the whole world through technological developments. This has facilitated easier physical movement around the globe through improved air transport and an enormous advance in the use of 'electronic space' as a result of new telecommunication and computer technology (Castells, 1996). The interconnected nature of the global economy is demonstrated when the problems, in particular national economies, e.g. Russia, Indonesia or Brazil, create ripples throughout the rest of the world economy. Another way of viewing globalisation is through the behaviour of companies. It is said that the major players are global in their operation making their decisions over production, administrative organisation, location and marketing without regard to national boundaries. This view has been particularly strong in the business and management literature (e.g. Ohmae, 1995). However it has been criticised for over emphasising the demise of the nation state for ideological purposes (Gray, 1998). Others argue that there is nothing new about globalisation and make references to other periods in history that were equally global (Knox, 1997; Storper, 1997; Hirst and Thompson, 1996). Such criticisms, although correctly identifying that much of the literature has an ideological role, are weakened by not acknowledging that the properties of modern globalisation, such as its extensiveness or intensity, may create conditions that are significantly different from the past.

Current empirical evidence is the base for a second criticism of the claim that the nation state is withering. This criticism suggests that the decline has been exaggerated and that instead there is a shifting of power and responsibilities between supra-national, national and sub-national levels in which the national level still has an important role. Rather than a global-national duality a new and more complex pattern is emerging (Sassen, 1995; Hobsbawm, 1998; Brenner, 1998). This pattern includes global regulation, regional structures such as the EU and NAFTA as well as the greater autonomy of cities. In this pattern nation states may still play a pivotal mediating role. Evidence also suggests that there are not many truly transnational corporations and that most multinational companies still have roots in their home country. Perfect competition and information does not exist in the global market place. In a situation of continued risk, local and cultural factors are still important, for example, companies draw on very specific localities for their research and development activity (Storper, 1997).

Notwithstanding the above debates globalisation is widely seen as creating a new role for cities. A theme that dominates the literature is the discussion of a new world urban hierarchy. One of the first expressions of this was in the article by Friedman and Wolff (1982), developed by Friedman (1986) as the "world city hypothesis". Cities are characterised by the degree to which they can be identified as global players and Friedman identified primary and secondary cities. Others have taken up this theme and devised their own hierarchies, for example Thrift (1989) identified New York, London and Tokyo as global cities, a second tier as zonal centres and a third as regional centres. Such typologies depend upon the criteria used and Friedman and Thrift focus particularly on the concentration of international institutions, banks and the headquarters of transnational corporations. Thus the primary determination of world city status is seen to be the administrative decisions of such companies. There is a general consensus that New York, London and Tokyo stand apart at the top of the hierarchy. These are the three cities explored by Sassen in her seminal work, *The Global City* (1991). She builds on the world city hypothesis and conducts a detailed empirical investigation of economic activity, labour markets and demography. The central theme of her work is that these cities provide the location for the principal command and control points for international business and commerce. As globalisation allows economic functions to disperse more widely round the globe so the need for central control and management also increases and these functions are concentrated in fewer, key, locations. Certain other activities are also seen to operate at a global level because of their nature - here a principal example is the financial services industry. The intense concentration of such institutions generates further activity in the form of other services or the production of financial, computing or media innovations.

Another theme of Sassen's work is the increase in social polarisation in world cities characterised by a high wage sector working in the globally oriented activities and a low-wage, often immigrant, population servicing these people. Such social differentiation in world cities is also discussed by other authors (e.g. Fainstein *et al* 1992; Mollenkopf and Castells 1991) although a simplistic notion of a dual city is dismissed in favour of a more complex pattern of change. In his empirical work on London, Hamnett (1994) concludes that a process of professionalisation has been taking place rather than polarisation while others (e.g. Bruegel, 1996) stress the need to explore the gender dimension. The main point of these discussions for planners is that whatever the details of these social changes they have spatial implications. For example gentrification has been occurring for a long while in these cities but the new economic changes may be creating an intensification or variation in these processes. The question arises over whether there are adverse consequences for the city that require some form of policy intervention. Peter Hall concludes that these processes result in 'acute problems of urban imbalance and social equity for cities and their populations: islands of affluence surrounded by seas of poverty and resentment. This is one of the main questions to be addressed in strategic urban thinking' (1998, p.964).

The value of the "world city hypothesis" and Sassen's work is that it established firm links between the global economic processes and changes within cities themselves, however it has also attracted a number of comments. These largely relate to the need to build on the work to provide greater analytical complexity. Differences between the

three top cities are downplayed. For example there are more immigrants in New York; the state plays a greater role in diminishing some of the effects of polarisation in London (Hamnett, 1996); and the major companies in Tokyo, although operating internationally, are largely Japanese businesses firmly embedded in the national economic and political networks. Many of the characteristics, such as the growth of financial services, identified in the three cities can also be detected further down the city hierarchy. It is not clear how far the characteristics are a general phenomena and how far they are restricted to the three top cities. Similarly the social polarisation can be said to be the result of more general economic changes not confined to those cities attracting the core command and control functions. There is also said to be a deterministic flavour to the analysis. As Storper puts it, to regard the city as a kind of machine responding to outside forces limits explanatory power (1997). A greater historical dimension would have strengthened the discussion of the relative importance of local contexts and cultures (Dieleman and Hamnett, 1994).

Thus it can been seen that 'globalisation' and the 'world city hypothesis' are concepts that generate considerable debate and potential for further analytical development. The aim in providing this outline is to show that the topic is complex and contains considerable variety of opinion. This contrasts with the approach taken in three cities that are explored in the rest of the paper. In these case studies a rather homogeneous and simplistic stance is adopted. In all three cases it is assumed that if cities are to gain competitive advantage they need to beat their rivals in the game of attracting inward investment in the leading sectors of the new globalised economy. As Harvey noted almost ten years ago there has been a shift in the attitudes of urban government from a managerial approach to entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989). This entrepreneurial stance includes viewing the city as a product that needs to be marketed. There has been extensive analysis in recent years on the rise of city marketing in which image is seen to be of supreme importance (e.g. Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Smyth 1994; Philo & Kearns, 1993; Paddison 1993). The particular image or vision adopted can determine policy priorities - a typical emphasis is on mega-events and developments that attract media attention. The city marketing approach also assumes certain customers for the city product. These customers are likely to be the decision-makers in the international institutions identified by Friedman, Sassen and others as the leading determinants of world city status. The land, buildings and infrastructure required for these institutions and the activities linked to them will figure strongly in a city marketing strategy. The provision of these facilities can potentially create problems for some existing citizens, for example through higher housing costs, gentrification, or airport noise, and can also lead to lost opportunities as resources are devoted to these world city functions.

The following sections of the paper will explore the strategic planning for London, Sydney and Singapore in recent years. The hypothesis explored is that the response to globalisation has produced a renewed emphasis on strategic thinking that directly taps into the developments in the global economy. The three cities increasingly view themselves as being in a competitive environment in which they have to take a proactive stance to capture economic activity and maintain their position in the world city hierarchy. New urban strategies are seen as an important part of this approach and are closely linked to city marketing. As a result economic objectives dominate the plans.

London - a world city

London was a relative latecomer to the business of city promotion, handicapped by its lack of any city-wide government after the abolition of the Greater London Council in 1986. The London Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC) had been set up in the wake of abolition to discuss planning issues that crossed the boundaries of the thirty-three local planning authorities within London. This committee, that had representation from these authorities, prepared strategic planning reports but it was only an advisory body. It presented its ideas to central government which prepared the statutory strategic planning guidance for the city. In tune with the non-interventionist ideology of the period, the guidance in 1989 was only a few pages long and set out the main parameters within which the local authorities should operate. As a result of the ideology of non-intervention and institutional fragmentation, very little strategic planning took place after the abolition of the GLC. LPAC produced strategic policies but these had limited impact on central government. However from the late 1980s onwards there was increasing pressure for more concerted action. The City of London, a small local authority covering the financial district with unique institutional arrangements based upon its medieval charter that privileges the business community, has been active in commissioning reports and funding promotional bodies. For example it commissioned the London Business School to analyse the factors needed to ensure the continued success of London's financial services in the new competitive environment (London Business School, 1995). One of the conclusions of this study was the difficulty posed by the lack of a single voice to promote London. A similar conclusion was expressed in the earlier consultant's report *London: World City Moving into the 21st Century* (Coopers & Lybrand Deloitte, 1991). This was a study that surveyed leading international business opinion in order to see what London needed to do to retain its competitive position. It was commissioned by LPAC and supported by the City of London, City of Westminster and London Docklands Development Corporation.

By the early 1990s central government had also accepted the view that more needed to be done to enhance London's competitive position to counteract its fragmented institutional structure (Newman and Thornley, 1997). In 1992 central government set up the London Forum to promote the capital but the following year this was merged into London First, a similar body set up by the private sector. This set the pattern of private sector leadership with central government backing that was to dominate strategic thinking in London over the next five years. In the same year the government claimed that 'other European cities are organising themselves to compete more effectively for inward investment' (DoE, 1993, p.2) and as a result an inward investment agency London First Centre was established. In 1993 yet another initiative was announced called City Pride. The idea was that central government would give some financial backing to its three major cities if they produced visions or strategies to show how they could make themselves more successful in the competition with other cities in the world. They were asked to prepare a prospectus of future priorities and action which co-ordinated the public, private and voluntary sectors. In London the job of orchestrating this exercise was given to the private sector body London First. Meanwhile central government was becoming more and more involved in strategic planning for the city as the problems of fragmentation continued. It established a Minister for London, a Cabinet Sub-Committee for the capital, the Government Office for London with representation from the difference Ministries with interests in

London policy, and produced a new enhanced Strategic Guidance for London that extended to seventy-five pages. In 1995 they also established the Joint London Advisory Panel to advise the Cabinet sub-committee. This new body consisted of the same membership as that of the London Pride Partnership led by London First. This arrangement illustrates again the close working relationship between central government and the private sector.

In 1995 the London Pride Prospectus (London Pride Partnership, 1995) was published and set the frame for strategic priorities. In its opening statement it sets out its aim to ensure London's position as the only world city in Europe. It seeks to achieve this through three interrelated missions of a robust and sustainable economy drawing on a world class workforce, greater social cohesion, and a high quality provision of infrastructure, services and good environment. Although it contains short sections on targets for affordable housing and policies to improve air quality, energy conservation and waste management, most of the prospectus is devoted to business growth, the development of skills and transport provision. Measures are set out to support business and attract inward investment such as adequate provision of good sites, telecommunication facilities, suitably trained labour market, promotional activity, improved access to the airports and better public transport. The priorities of the Partnership then had a strong influence on central government thinking through the London Advisory Panel and its input into the revised and expanded Strategic Guidance for London (Government Office for London, 1996a). In this new Guidance it is said that 'the promotion of London as a capital of world city status is fundamental to government policy. To remain competitive, London needs a clear sense of direction…..Strategic Planning Guidance sets the framework for planning action by all those involved in the development process' (p.2). It continues by warning that London is under considerable pressure from rival cities such as Paris, Frankfurt, Barcelona and Berlin who are 'fighting harder than ever to attract investment and business opportunities' (p.3). The same year the government produced another document *A Competitive Capital: The Government's Strategy for enhancing London's Competitiveness* (GOL, 1996b) that sets out all the government policies aimed at the major objective of ensuring 'that London retains its rightful place at the top of the league of world cities' (p.3). It reinforced the role of the Strategic Guidance for London in ensuring that local planning authorities recognise London's world city role and the need to address competitiveness.

In 1997 a major change took place in British politics when the Labour party under Tony Blair won the election after eighteen years of Conservative rule. This has had a significant effect on the institutional context for strategic planning in London. A completely new political arrangement, the Greater London Authority, has been devised. For the first time in history this includes an elected Mayor for the whole of London. A major theme for the new authority will be co-ordination and integration of policy. It will be responsible for drawing up a new plan for the co-ordination of land use and development across the whole city, to be called the Spatial Development Strategy. It will also be required to produce an integrated transport strategy, an air quality management strategic plan, waste management strategy, regular state of the environment reports, a strategy for culture, media and leisure, and an economic development strategy (DETR, 1998). The European Union funded a research project called *The London Study* (ALG, 1999) which began work in 1997 and reported two years later. This carried out an analysis of London and set out a future vision and

action plan for a sustainable London. It set out an agenda for the new government of London that sought to be competitive, sustainable and socially exclusive. Meanwhile the economic strategy, the focus for emphasising competitiveness and the need to attract inward investment will be produced under the London Development Agency - an arm of the new authority. Work has already begun towards this strategy in its precursor the London Development Partnership, giving it a head start over the other work of the GLA. It will be intriguing to see how the different strategies are co-ordinated and any differences in priorities resolved. In this context it is relevant to note that Tony Blair sees globalisation as inevitable and requiring an accommodating stance from government. He has said that 'since it is inconceivable that the UK would want to withdraw unilaterally from the global market-place, we must instead adjust our policies to its existence' (Blair, 1996, p.86).

Sydney - a regional centre

Sydney has established itself as the leading Australian city in world city terms (Baum, 1997; Stimson, 1995). It is the major international air hub, is the most important financial centre and, during the growth in Asian economies, extended its role to become a location for many transnational corporations wanting to service south east Asia. The strategic planning of the Sydney metropolitan region is undertaken by the State of New South Wales (NSW). In 1988 a Liberal-National coalition won the state election and formed a government with an ideology of limited government, cuts in state finances, and privatisation. The state government was keen to attract global activities to Sydney but found it difficult to provide infrastructure and tax concessions, as the main revenue raising powers were held by the Federal Government. As a result 'state government land holdings and urban planning and development powers have become the main instruments used by the NSW state government to attract global investment' (Searle and Bounds, 1996, p.5). In 1995 the state government produced a new metropolitan strategy called *Cities for the 21st Century*. It was heralded as a new approach to strategic planning that was more broadly based and more flexible, 'as we move into an age of more rapid change and diverse global influences, a metropolitan planning strategy needs to be dynamic rather than rigid' (Department of Planning, 1995, p.12). The new approach attracted some criticism from local government and planners because it lacked analysis and was too vague (Moseley, 1995).

In attempting to encourage the development of a world city role, suitable sites for new commercial developments are of key importance in attracting the command and control function identified by Sassen. One of the policies in *Cities for the 21st Century* was 'the promotion nationally and internationally of Central Sydney as a corporate headquarters and financial centre and also as a tourism centre, and the development of planning and management in support of these roles' (Department of Planning, 1995, p.92). It is therefore interesting to see how the state government sought to implement such a policy when the local authority, the City of Sydney, had opposing views. The state has the power to intervene in any planning decision that has strategic significance. Searle (1998) shows how it used its powers on numerous occasions during the 1980s and 1990s. In this period the state adopted a pro-development ideology whatever the political control while the City of Sydney was subjected to local community pressures. This led to many conflicts particularly

regarding the retention of buildings with heritage value. Such opposition was over-ruled by the state using its power to make decisions on large developments - on some occasions this contravened the controls set out in the local plans. Other mechanisms were also used to ensure the implementation of state policy. In the early 1980s the state decided to develop Darling Harbour as a major recreation and convention centre with a linked mono-rail (Huxley, 1991). These had to be built in time for the 1988 Bicentennial year but the requirement to conduct an environmental impact assessment created an obstacle in this tight timetable. So the state passed a special Act of Parliament to give planning powers to a new Darling Harbour Authority that would not be subject to council controls or planning laws (Searle, 1998; Daly & Malone, 1996). When professional and community opposition developed over the proposed mono-rail this was given the same treatment. Another ploy adopted by the state was to change the boundary of the City of Sydney to try and ensure a local council sympathetic to global city development. In 1988 a special Central Sydney Planning Committee was established dominated by State appointees. This committee had responsibility for the preparation of local plans for the City and for decisions on all developments with a value of over $50m.

In 1995 the Labor Party returned to control the state. Most of the previous government's *Cities for the 21st Century* strategy matched their own electoral programme. However it was felt that *Cities for the 21st Century* did not explore sufficiently the international context and so they commissioned a new study (Searle, 1996). In the forward to the study report, entitled *Sydney as a Global City*, the Minister for State and Regional Development says 'we must ensure that planning for Sydney supports a competitive and efficient economy…..planning for new and efficient road and rail networks, supporting existing employment locations and providing a continuing supply of sensibly located land are key elements in this focus' (Searle, 1996, p.v). The report presents a very thorough analysis of the factors that influence Sydney's potential as a world city and the implications for planning. In 1997 the State produced a new review of strategic planning called *A Framework for Growth and Change* (Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, 1997a). This adopted many of the approaches of the previous plan and had an expanded section on fostering a competitive and adaptable economy, drawing on the work in *Sydney as a Global City*. New roads and airport expansion were proposed. *A Framework for Growth and Change* pointed out that the State would continue to use its powers to make decisions over major projects as this helps to attract major inward investment and 'encourage major companies to locate regional headquarters and facilities in the Region' (p.59). Meanwhile the city had been bidding for the Olympic Games under the slogan of being the 'Green Games'. This campaign heightened the profile of environmental issues in the city. Although many of the principles in the winning Olympic bid were watered down in the process of implementation the increased sensitivity towards the environment had its effect on the strategic plan. Links were made between economic competitiveness and environmental quality. However the social impact of a global city strategy was not addressed.

In 1997 a new body was established called *The Committee for Sydney* - officially launched by the Premier of NSW in August of that year. It comprises business and community leaders and 'seeks to act as a catalyst for building a better future for the city on issues related to the environment, education, business investment and the arts. The Committee seeks to make Sydney an increasingly significant international centre

of commerce and to generate future employment opportunities for the city' (Committee for Sydney, 1998). 'We are convinced that we have to think smarter, work harder and plan better if we are to build a viable future for our city in an intensely and increasingly competitive regional and world economy' (Committee for Sydney, 1997, pp.1-2). In the Committee's policy statement it places considerable emphasis on the need for a plan or vision. It says 'many of the world's major cities - such as Barcelona, Berlin, London, Paris, Rome and Venice are showing us the way. They have developed clear visions of their future and are applying long-term strategic plans to realise them' (1997, p.5). The accuracy of this comment could certainly be questioned but its aim is clear. It is trying to imply that Sydney is falling behind in the competitive urban development game. The following sentence in the statement makes this even clearer when it is claimed that Sydney had no long-term strategic plan, conveniently ignoring the documents discussed above. This suggests that what the Committee really had in mind was an alternative plan which fitted their aims more closely. So it was no surprise when in 1998 they commissioned a study entitled *Sydney 2020* from consultants Coopers & Lybrand to 'determine what is needed to develop and enhance Sydney's future as a world city' (Committee for Sydney, 1998).

Singapore - city state

Singapore was founded as a trading post by the British early in the nineteenth century. Until independence in 1965 the trading interests dominated and government was only interested in supporting these interests. In 1965 the new state was cut off from its hinterland and set about pursuing a survival strategy. The good world communication based upon trade provided a useful base, however it was decided that the state's industry needed to be developed if it was to secure its economic future. The state took the lead in organising this economic strategy. New institutional structures were needed to facilitate, develop and control the foreign direct investment, such as the Development Bank of Singapore and the Jurong Town Corporation that provided the infrastructure requirements. One of the most important bodies was the Economic Development Board (EDB), an arm of government that developed strategies to induce potential investors. So from this early period the Singapore government was actively involved in city promotion. The interventionist stance continued through the 1970s with the EDB continuing to 'play an important role in the ongoing adjustments of the Singapore economy to niches and opportunities in global capitalism' (Chua, 1998, p.983).

The limits on the size of the work force and the restricted land area made the government realise that it was becoming increasingly uncompetitive in labour intensive industry. An Economic Committee was established which concluded that Singapore should focus on developing as a service centre and seek to attract company headquarters to serve South East Asia, develop tourism, banking, and offshore-based activities (Chua, 1998). The land requirements for this service sector orientation had already been prepared in the early 1970s when the government had already realised that it lacked the banking infrastructure for a modern economy. A new banking and corporate district known as the 'Golden Shoe' was planned incorporating the historic commercial area. This now houses all the major companies and various government financial agencies. Thus the economic development of Singapore has been very consciously planned and the latest strategy is very clearly oriented to establishing

Singapore as a ‘world city’. It is well placed to succeed as it can draw upon its historic roots as a world trading centre, has invested heavily in telecommunications and air transport infrastructure, is well located to other Asian economies, has developed a safe and clean environment and utilised the international language of English.

The centrally planned state economic strategy is closely linked to land use and development planning. The EDB is a key influence on the strategic land use plans that are prepared by another Board of government, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA). The private sector is also involved in the planning process as they are invited to give their opinions in the committees that are set up to advise these government Boards. Thus in preparing its plans the URA responds to the views of the various advisory committees and the Boards and Ministries of government, in which the EDB plays an important agenda setting role. The URA translates these discussions into land use and development terms through its preparation of a strategic plan for the whole island, called the Concept Plan. The latest Concept Plan was completed in 1991 and indicates the future development of the state in three stages, 2000, 2010 and ‘year X’. The mission statement of the URA is to ‘plan and facilitate the physical development of Singapore into a tropical city of excellence’ (URA, 1998, p1). Previous statements also included the word ‘regulate’; however this has been dropped as it was not felt to be business friendly. The Concept plan is certainly clearly and openly oriented towards the attraction of business; ‘economic growth has always been our most pressing concern. It still is, even though Singapore is already a major centre in terms of commerce, industry and finance. But progress does not wait. Singapore cannot afford to take a complacent view now that we have achieved a reasonable level of business success. If we are to help lift Singapore to higher living standards, the muscle will be provided by our economy’ (URA, 1991, p.18). The plan seeks to ensure this continued economic growth through ‘restructuring the city’ to ensure that the facilities needed by future business are planned now, this includes transport and telecommunication infrastructure, land, and environmental quality. A major concern is to avoid congestion through over-concentration in the central area and so the New Concept Plan deviates from previous plans by having a strong decentralisation policy. This includes four major regional centres each serving 800,000 people. This does not mean that the existing CBD will not also grow. After studies of other world cities a major extension of the existing financial district is planned around the Marina Bay attempting to replicate the vitality of other cities with waterside central areas such as Sydney and San Francisco (Chua, 1989). This is to be achieved by major land reclamation of 667 hectares. Part of this has already been developed as a conference and exhibition zone and the rest will be used for CBD expansion. However the need for vitality has been recognised and a mixed zoning approach is adopted to include housing and entertainment.

One of the new features of the latest plan is a broader conception of what contributes to economic success. This encompasses high quality residential provision, a good environment, leisure facilities and exciting city life. Thus there is more provision for low density housing often in waterfront communities linked to beaches and recreational facilities. The lower housing densities will put considerable pressure on the very limited land available for development. This creates problems for another of the plan’s aims which is to stress environmental quality. More and more of the remaining open area will be developed and the only natural landscape surviving will be a small zone in the centre of the island that serves as a water catchment area. The

environmental policy is therefore very much concerned with the 'greening' of development - what is referred to as the 'beautification' of Singapore. The plan concentrates on green zones to define the boundaries of settlements and along transport corridors. The incidental green provision within housing areas is also given considerable attention. Much of the environmental provision is linked to the prime objective of attracting business, e.g. golf courses, recreation areas, and beaches. The plan places much emphasis on good leisure provision and the need to exploit its island setting. One way of providing this is through further land reclamation to create a whole new island devoted to leisure and luxury housing which will stretch from the central area to the airport. The planners have recently also given much attention to the concept of the 24-hour city and the café society. A promotion has taken place along the Singapore river to create a café zone. This has included the realisation, rather late in the day, of the value of retaining older buildings and the creation of a continuous riverside promenade (Yu-Ning, 1998). Since the relaxation in 1996 of strict guidelines on outdoor eating areas this has become an extremely popular area in the evenings (Fong, 1997). Also in 1998 the URA created a new entertainment area in the centre of the city which they are promoting as 'the city's one-stop dynamic entertainment scene' (Brennan, 1998, p.4). It can be said that a current concern is how to use the planning system to create opportunities for greater spontaneity.

Discussion

This paper began with the hypothesis that cities have been taking a greater interest in formulating strategic plans but that these have limited objectives. The motivation for these plans derives from the assumption that cities have to be more competitive in the context of globalisation. Politicians have adopted the view that it would improve the competitiveness and promotion of their cities if they had some kind of co-ordinated vision or strategy. This is evident in all three cities studied. In London the abolition of the GLC left a vacuum in metropolitan government that was filled by a wide range of different organisations. However by the early 1990s there was pressure from the private sector for a more visible and concerted promotion of the city, including the presentation of a future vision. A number of research reports were published exploring London as a world city and the threat of other European cities was constantly proclaimed. The close co-operation of central government and the private sector was a feature of London governance during this period. It resulted in the expanded Strategic Guidance for London and the London Pride Prospectus both stressing the importance of economic competition. In Sydney the importance of promoting the city as a world city was also explicitly recognised and the state government commissioned a special study. The ideas in this study then fed into the revised metropolitan strategy prepared in 1995. The Singapore government since independence has taken a strong interventionist role. Deciding on the direction or vision for the city has always been a major part of its task. In recent years promoting the city as a major financial and commercial centre for the region has been the central aim. This has now been expanded with greater attention given to the role of leisure and quality of life in contributing to economic growth. These promotional aims provide the foundation for the city strategic plan, the Concept Plan.

In all three cases the strong influence of the private sector can be detected in setting the priorities for the future vision. London First, a private sector body, had the ear of

central government and co-ordinated the London Pride Prospectus. In Sydney the new Committee for Sydney, a similar organisation, is pressing hard for even greater consideration of Sydney's world city role. The Singapore government uses its Economic Development Board to set its strategy aims. This Board seeks advice from the private sector and sets the framework for the planning strategies.

The global orientation of the strategies in all three cities produces an emphasis on new sites for commercial, convention and leisure activities. These need to be in central or prestigious locations such as by the waterside. It is interesting to note the institutional devices that are used to ensure that the political decisions are made to favour such investment in these locations. In London the central area bodies have dominated the London-wide strategies during the 1990s. The City of London, the City of Westminster and the government appointed quango, the London Docklands Development Corporation (LDDC), exerted their considerable power. In the dockland development area the LDDC replaced the elected local authorities in the control of development decisions. In Sydney the State used its power to intervene and take over strategic development, it set up a special authority for the Darwin Harbour development that was not subject to normal laws, and it by-passed the elected council for the central area when it started showing NIMBY tendencies. The city-state of Singapore with its single authority had comprehensive and positive powers that enabled it to penetrate local level decision-making and devise dramatic and extensive plans for the expansion of the CBD. This provided a long term and well co-ordinated approach helping to foster investors' confidence about the future of Singapore's world city role.

Thus during the 1990s all three cities have been developing new metropolitan strategies. These strategies are all very firmly rooted in the discourse about competition between cities and the use of strategies for promotion. The major aim of attracting inward investment is reflected in the influence of private sector bodies. In all cases special arrangements have been set up to incorporate these interests. However the cities are not acting autonomously and national, or in the Sydney case regional, government is still playing a major role. This expresses itself particularly in the way higher level governments set the framework within which cities operate and encourage or sometimes enforce the competitive approach. These higher level governments are also very active in setting up the special institutional arrangements for important development projects, thus bypassing local democracy. These devices ensure that the economic goals are not diverted by local community opposition. The institutional arrangements in the three cities present a more complex picture than the simple nation-state/city dichotomy mentioned in some of the literature. There is a varied interplay between government, regional and city governments and between government, the community and special bodies set up to implement development. In all three cases examined, important influences on the metropolitan strategies have been higher level government and private sector bodies.

An interesting feature of the Singapore approach is its combination of a liberal attitude in external relations and a strong interventionist approach in internal matters. The city fully interacts with the global market but at the same time employs strict control over development. The institutions and policies of the city have a 'double function in creating *laissez faire* conditions for private enterprises and financial institutions, and regulating in order to protect business' (Haila, 1997, p10). The

gradual release of public land for development within strict planning controls provides stability in the real estate market and curbs rises in property prices. This is a major attraction for inward investors. Gleeson (1998) has suggested that there seems to be a paradox in the way that globalisation leads to a liberalised deregulatory approach to planning at the broader level while positive planning is used as an instrument for boosterism by cities. On the other hand this could be viewed not as a paradox but a complementary approach in which the different levels of government take on different roles. Nevertheless the combined effect of deregulation within the national planning legislation, city plans that are geared to particular economic interests, and development schemes beyond local community influence, is a severe reduction in democratic control.

In the literature on globalisation there is a debate about the degree of inevitability in the process. As already described, one argument is that the global economic forces require cities to respond competitively with adaptive strategies that can attract the new economic investments. This leads to a certain kind of strategy with particular kinds of plans, policies and land allocations. The stance taken in the three cities during the 1990s has been to accept this argument. Alternatively it can be argued that government does have the discretion to intervene more positively in this process and pursue a wider range of aims. These could include a greater emphasis on environmental and social objectives. There are indications that many cities are starting to take a more diverse approach to economic development and acknowledge the importance of such wider factors (for evidence from the United States see Clarke & Gaile, 1997). It can be argued that the dedicated striving to win the competitive economic game can create severe problems of environmental degradation and social polarisation. In the longer term, environmental and social sustainability is important for economic prosperity. This is an argument that can be used to lobby for more comprehensive strategic plans. It also requires the involvement of a wider range of local organisations and a positive attitude on the part of government. During the 1990s in the three cities investigated the pressure groups that had a dominant influence on the governmental agenda were those arguing for the paramount importance of short-term economic imperatives. Those pursuing social and environmental aims were either weak or non-existent, although the Sydney Olympic Games bid shows that opportunities did arise. The London case also shows that the situation is not static or predetermined. The change in national government, although still upholding the power of globalisation, has created a new institutional arrangement in London with potential for a more open debate about the balance between the long and short term, endogenous growth and inward investment and between economic, environmental and social aims. Even in Singapore the acceptance of the importance of the environment in attracting business provides an opportunity to argue for an expansion in the scope of environmental policy.

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